

How can we co-create a better world?

Petra Bakewell-Stone

“Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tunes without the words
And never stops at all”

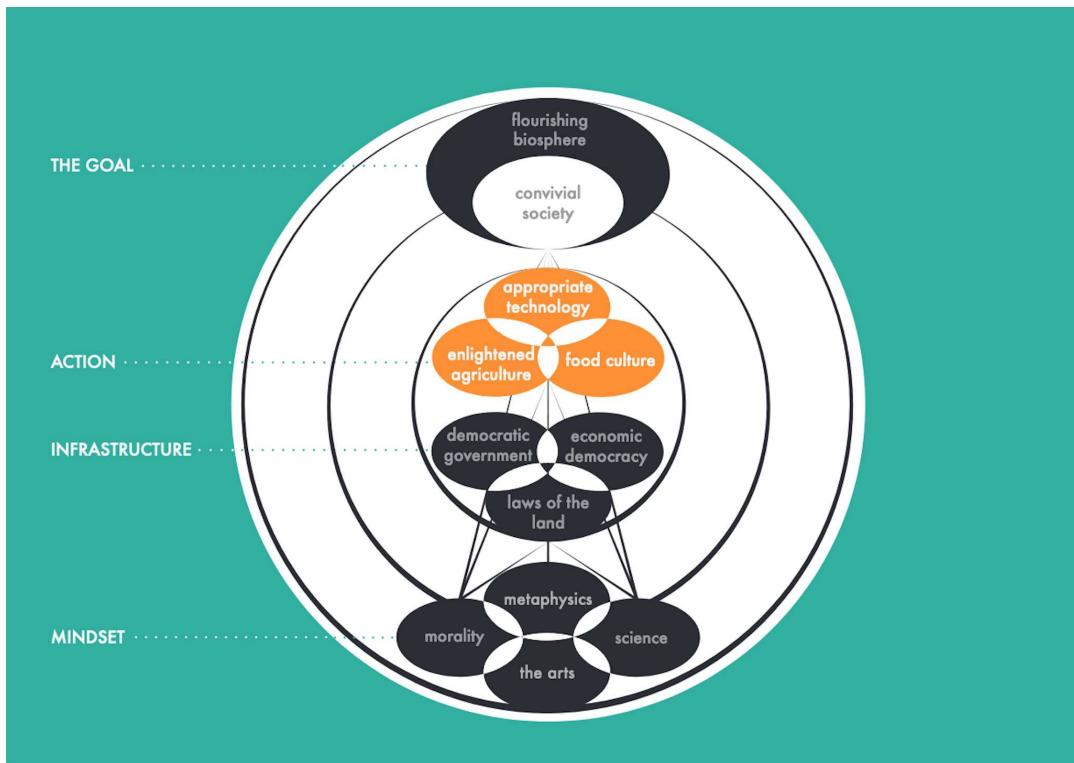
Emily Dickinson, 1862

On April 17th 2021, biologist Colin Tudge presented ideas from his latest book *The Great Re-think*[[I](#)] to 50+ participants of a webinar series co-hosted by the Scientific and Medical Network, Pari Center and College for Real Farming and Food Culture.

The day explored the vision and actions required to co-create a grassroots renaissance. According to Tudge, it is easily within our grasp to solve the world’s problems but only if we fundamentally rethink and act accordingly. Since those in power are committed to the status quo, we must take matters into our own hands, as advocated by Erik Dammann’s The Future in Our Hands. We can do this by re-conceptualising everything we take for granted.

Since hope is at the heart of his thesis, Tudge referenced not only poet Dickinson but also St. Paul, as hope is so often nourished by faith and the virtue of patience. It is no accident that venues of the annual Oxford Real Farming Conference that Tudge founded with his wife Ruth West have included a church, townhall, conference room and pub. Their approach spans spirituality, governance, business and bonhomie.

First-off the vision: **convivial societies – with personal fulfilment! - within a flourishing biosphere**. After presenting he asked whether it is sensible. Its logic and appeal was vindicated by zero critics. Furthermore, he proposed a threefold approach to action: **appropriate technology, food culture and enlightened agriculture**. This is supported by the infrastructure of democratic government, economic democracy and laws of the land and underpinned by a mindset, encompassing metaphysics, science, the arts and morality.



Caption for diagram: Source: Tudge, C. (2021) *The Great Re-Think: A 21st Century Renaissance*.

Tudge cited Ivan Illich[2] as inspiration for the term convivial. From the Latin *convivialis*, and *convivium*, to feast, the word evokes lively, jovial, sociable and festive societies. It has also been adopted by Slow Food to celebrate good, clean, fair food.

Illich wrote that the elite have come to exert a monopoly on basic human activities including health, education, agriculture and home-building, effectively waging ‘war on subsistence’ and robbing society of vital skills and know-how. Since much economic development results in poverty and dependency, he proposed inverting the structure to provide tools that guarantee our right to work with independent efficiency. Tudge calls for a people-led agrarian renaissance leaving what we do not need to “wither on the vine”.

With regards to a flourishing biosphere, Tudge believes that it is perfectly possible to take care of humanity and our fellow creatures, but only with truly radical change brought about by people at large.

In terms of action, Greta Thunberg said: “the one thing we need more than hope is action. Once we start to act, hope is everywhere”. David Peat qualifies this with a simple adjective in the title to his book *Gentle Action*^[3].

E.F. Schumacher’s seminal *Small is Beautiful*^[4] argued that all technologies should be appropriate, such as the bicycle and the spinning wheel, a symbol of political independence popularised by Mahatma Gandhi.

Tudge also uses the expression “Real Farming” which embraces green economic democracy, food sovereignty and agroecology. The latter he defines as an approach which “treats individual farms as ecosystems and agriculture as a whole as a positive contributor to the biosphere”.

In addition to Slow Food which celebrates food culture and provenance, third party certification systems such as organic agriculture and pasture for life show promise for sustainable livelihoods. Denise Walton of Peelham farm described how allowing the soil and livestock to dictate the pace of production, taking into consideration water and grass, and practicing mob grazing in rotation and set-aside, can result in high “live weight gain” and excellent charcuterie. Furthermore, her farm prioritises the welfare of those employed by the farm to create meaningful work, and runs its own butchery, prompting discussion of the James Hutton Institute and animal nutritionist Bob Ørskov.

Participant Carol Lucis offered a simple but effective action: asking questions. She also mentioned quantum biology. Quantum agriculture is another area receiving attention, notably by Julia Wright of the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience and the U.K.’s Biodynamic Association.

Whilst these actions could be supported by democratic government, Tudge argues that those in power are unlikely to do what is needed, and are in fact largely leading us in the opposite direction. With both courage and humour he named and shamed some of the spivs who have climbed the ranks. Fellow presenter and eco-psychologist Andrew Fellows quoted Jung: “Where love rules, there is no will to power, and where power predominates, love is lacking.”^[5]

In addition, economic democracy is fundamental and reference was made to Kate Raworth’s concept of “doughnut economics”. Facilitator David Lorimer cited the film The Seeds of Vandana Shiva which shatter the precarious illusions upon which our society is currently built. Whilst complacency was highlighted as a major challenge, we are also hampered by fear.

The mindset required to achieve the stated vision incorporates the oft-neglected philosophical field of metaphysics, the study of the ultimate nature of reality. Another aspect is science. Whilst good science is vital, we also need to restore a sense of the sacred. Thus Lorimer

mentioned Steve Taylor's *Spiritual Science*[\[6\]](#). He also shared Schumacher's argument that 'science for manipulation' is valuable only when subordinate to 'science for understanding' or wisdom; until then 'science for manipulation' is a danger to humanity[\[7\]](#).

Furthermore, the arts are vital. The Arts and Crafts movement, inspired by John Ruskin and William Morris in the 19th Century, was a reaction against the demoralising effects of industrialisation. Through its advocacy of economic and social reform, the movement maintains its relevance, as does Morris' rallying cry for "art which is made by the people for the people, as a joy to the maker and the user"[\[8\]](#). In this age of mass manufacture, we are challenged to interrogate why craft matters and what its role(s) should be. From a religious perspective, God is the divine craftsman.

The twin principles, both rooted in metaphysics, of morality (what is right) and ecology (what is necessary and possible), can guide us. However, as lecturer Bruce Wannell once said: "no good deed goes unpunished!" Whilst it is hard to argue with morals like compassion and reverence for nature, a complementary blueprint also inspired by nature is Practical Ethics conceived by Eiji Uehiro. This teaches us to live: positively, optimistically, harmoniously, for others and with good manners.

Nature's way is also predominant in the Nordic tradition, with insights offered by mountaineer and deep ecologist Arne Næss and open-air philosopher Sigmund Setreng. Participant Eve Jackson suggested following nature as opposed to leading it. There is natural do-nothing-farming originating in Japan as a result Fukuoka[\[9\]](#). Another attendee, Robert Norris who writes on its application in India(*rishi kheti*)[\[10\]](#) suggested simply looking at one's plot for a year, echoing the first principle of permaculture: observation.

Rather than despair in the face of global catastrophe, we can conversely choose to turn our attention and support to the wellspring of positive initiatives. These confirm that "another world is possible", to use the slogan of the World Social Forum. This annual meeting of civil society organisations offers a self-conscious effort to develop an alternative future, also the ethos behind Alex Evans' Larger Us.

The environmental movement precipitated by Carson's *Silent Spring*[\[11\]](#) has merged with a social justice movement, the so-called "Blessed Unrest" coined by Paul Hawken[\[12\]](#). Although it follows no unifying ideology and is not recognised by politicians, the public or the media, Hawken argues that this movement can benefit all. Optimism was undoubtedly kindled amongst the diverse participants of this webinar, from yoga teacher to biomimicry[\[13\]](#) researcher. A tiny sample of our worldwide 7.7 billion-strong population of K-strategist[\[14\]](#) humans, bringing to bear formidable positive energy, sharing and kindness.

A couple of years after Dickinson wrote her stanza on hope, Abraham Lincoln ended his first inaugural address with a plea to "the better angels of our nature". With bright hope for

our future, this joyful conversation spanning countries and cultures can thrive and catalyse the creation of Martin Luther King's "beloved community".

References

- [1] Tudge, C. (2021) *The Great Re-Think: A 21st Century Renaissance*. Tuscany: Pari Publishing
- [2] Illich, I. (1973) *Tools for Conviviality*. New York: Harper & Row
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- [4] Schumacher, E.F. (1973) *Small is Beautiful: A study of economics as if people mattered*. New York: HarperCollins
- [5] Jung, C. (1916) *Psychology of the Unconscious: A study of the transformations and symbolisms of the libido, a contribution to the history of the evolution of thought*. London: Kegan Paul Trench Trubner
- [6] Taylor, S. (2018) *Spiritual Science: Why science needs spirituality to make sense of the world*. London: Watkins
- [7] Schumacher, E.F. (1977) *A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Harper & Row.
- [8] Morris, W. (1882) *Hopes and fears for art: Five lectures delivered in Birmingham, London, and Nottingham, 1878-1881*. London: Ellis & White
- [9] Fukuoka, M. (1973) *The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press
- [10] <https://www.permaculturenews.org/2014/06/23/revisiting-masanobu-fukuokas-revolutionary-agriculture/>
- [11] Carson, R. (1962) *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- [12] Hawken, P. (2008) *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World*. New York: Penguin books
- [13] According to the Biomimicry Institute, biomimicry is "a practice that learns from and mimics the strategies found in nature to solve human design challenges – and find hope

along the way". <https://biomimicry.org/what-is-biomimicry/>

[14] K-strategists are species whose populations fluctuate at or near to the carrying capacity of the environment in which they live.